

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
EXTENSION SERVICE
Washington 25, D. C.

READERSHIP STUDY OF EXTENSION SERVICE REVIEW

A. Survey of What County Agents Read in the April-May 1948 Issue *

Who Spoke for Agents?

The readership survey was taken in 16 States pretty well distributed in all parts of the country. A 12-percent sample of all agents required taking every eighth or ninth county in these States. The counties were chosen at absolute random. The names of the counties were sent to the extension editor, and the questionnaires were filled out through personal interview with every agent in those particular counties. This gave 296 questionnaires--171 from men, 119 from women, and 6 from agents not reporting whether they were men or women--and is considered by statisticians as a fair sample of all agents. The States cooperating in the survey were: Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, and Wisconsin.

How Long Have These Agents Been in the Service?

The largest group (about 30 percent) were in the 1- to 2-year class. Twenty-five percent had from 3 to 5 years of extension experience, 19 percent from 6 to 10 years; and 23 percent had 11 or more years of service. As might be expected, the women did not have as many years of service as the men: 65 percent of the county agents and 30 percent of the home demonstration agents had more than 10 years of service, an indication that the Extension Service has a considerable holding power in spite of competition for personnel.

What Other Reading Did They Do?

The agent is a reader and reads a great variety of books and magazines--in fact, 2,179 were listed as read the previous month. The kind of reading depended on geographical location, local situations, and the agents' personal preferences and interests. The average agent read 7 books and magazines. About 33 percent read 4 to 6 books and magazines, and 27 percent read 10 or more different books and magazines the previous month. The agents who read the largest number of other magazines also did the most reading in the REVIEW. County agents seemed to do more reading than either the assistant agents or the home demonstration agents. However, home demonstration agents did more reading in the REVIEW.

The magazines mentioned by the largest number of agents as read the previous month are:

Farm Journal	120	4-H Club News	16
Country Gentleman	103	Southern Agriculturist	37
Progressive Farmer	87	Good Housekeeping	34
Better Farming Methods.....	81	Capper's Farmer	29
What's New in Home		Hoard's Dairyman	28
Economics	80	Time	25
National County Agent	80	American Home	22
County Agent	25	Farm and Ranch	21
Reader's Digest	74	Saturday Evening Post	20
Agricultural Leaders'		Better Crops and Plant Food ...	18
Digest	67	National Agriculture	16
Successful Farming	64	Texas Extensioner.....	16
Journal of Home Economics	56	U.S.D.A. Yearbook	16
Better Homes and Gardens	55	Practical Home Economics	14
Forecast	52	Michigan Farmer	13
Ladies' Home Journal	44	House Beautiful	11
Life	40	Woman's Home Companion	11
McCall's	38	Michigan Extension Service News	11
National 4-H Club News	35		

Who Reads the REVIEW?

About 69 percent, or 174, of these agents had seen the April-May issue of the REVIEW, and 59 percent had read something in it. The percentage of those who had not seen the issue, combined with the report from cooperating editors in four different States that agents said they did not see the magazine, indicated some hitch in distribution. All extension workers are supposed to be on the mailing list, and the magazine is mailed direct from the Government Printing Office.

What Did They Read the Most?

Among the 174 who had seen or read something in the magazine, 55 percent read the first article, "How Far Have We Come?" which was a general home demonstration story reporting on activities and trends. This received the highest readership in the paper and compares very favorably with articles getting high readership in similar surveys made by farm magazines of general distribution. Of course more women read the article; 77 percent of the home demonstration agents, 46 percent of the county agents, and 17 percent of the club agents read it.

The Second Best

The second article in the book, "Maine 4-H Club Enrolls Every Boy and Girl in Town," got a 53-percent reading among all agents, with the club agents giving it a very high readership of 92 percent. Home

demonstration agents gave it a 45-percent reading, and county agents a 56-percent reading. Though this was an eastern story, it seemed to get just as good readership in other parts of the country: 62 percent of the eastern agents read the article and 63 percent of the western agents. The central agents gave it a 57-percent reading, and the southern agents a 48-percent reading. It does not always seem to hold true that agents read only the articles from their own section of the country.

Other Articles With High Readership

Articles with a 40-percent or higher reading were:

"County Farm and Home Week," from New York--42 percent.

"I Learn About Conservation," by Roy L. Donohue, extension agronomist, Texas--44 percent.

This appealed to men more than to women, with a 60-percent reading among county agents and a 25-percent reading among both home demonstration agents and 4-H Club agents.

"What Will Keep Club Members Enthusiastic?" by Paul L. Maloney, of Nevada--47 percent.

4-H Club agents gave this a 58-percent reading, home demonstration agents a 49-percent, and county agents a 45-percent reading.

"Agents Prove Mettle in Maine Fire Disaster"--40 percent.

4-H Club agents gave this a 50-percent reading, home demonstration agents a 37-percent reading, and county agents a 41-percent reading.

"Home Demonstration Club in Hawaii"--40 percent.

This appealed most to home demonstration agents, who gave it a 71-percent reading.

"Among Ourselves"--43 percent.

Club agents gave this the best reading, with 50 percent reading it--48 percent of the home demonstration agents and 39 percent of the county agents read the page.

"Saipan Has Club Agent" had a 33-percent reading; 67 percent of the club agents read the item.

"Garden Briefs for 1948" was read by 45 percent of the home demonstration agents.

"Slides and Records Work Together" was read by 40 percent of the county agents.

The place in the magazine did not seem to make too much difference in the reading these articles received. Readers seem to thumb their way clear through the magazine and read what interests them, wherever it is.

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The Regular Departments

"Science Flashes" and "We Study Our Job" both polled a 38-percent reading. Southern agents seemed to give these two pages the best reading, with a 51-percent reading of "We Study Our Job" and a 46-percent reading of "Science Flashes." Home demonstration agents gave a 45-percent reading to both pages, whereas county agents gave "Science Flashes" a 38-percent reading and "We Study Our Job" a 37-percent reading. 4-H Club agents gave both pages slightly more than a 17-percent reading.

Do They Use the Ideas?

Of the 296 agents taking part in the survey, 174 said they had used some of the information or ideas in the magazine. These were not exactly the same 174 who had seen the April-May issue. More women than men claimed to have used ideas. In regard to an editorial page, 155 voted for such a page, and 220 asked for articles giving more background information on national programs. It was the assistant agents and those with 1 or 2 years' experience who came out most strongly for these two innovations. About 82 percent made some comment on the REVIEW.

Summary

In general, the agent reads a wide variety of books and magazines. The REVIEW ranks high among those listed as read the previous month. Those who read the most other magazines read the most in the April-May issue of the REVIEW. More articles were read in part than in full. On the average, agents read about seven items in that particular issue. Neither position in the magazine nor length seemed to be the deciding factor in whether the article was read, though the two with the highest readership were the first two articles, which were rather long. The reader seems to thumb through the magazine, reading a little of the items that interest him and all of those that are particularly in his field, wherever he finds them. He reads items from other regions about as readily as those from his own region. About 30 percent of the readers have from 1 to 2 years' experience, and they would like more material of an editorial nature and more background material on national programs. Agents with more than 6 years' experience had more often read this issue of the REVIEW. The number of agents who said that they did not see the magazine seems to indicate faulty distribution.